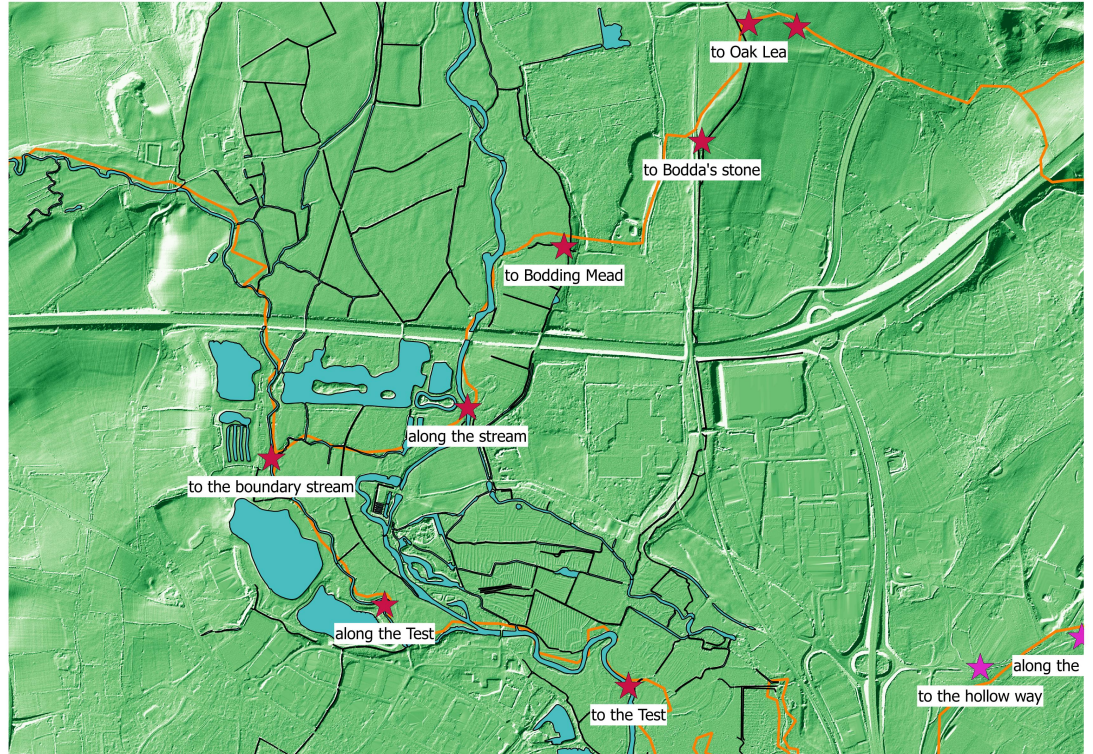


The northern boundary of the Nursling charter runs from the Test, across the floodplain and onto the river terrace on the east side of the valley:

ðanon andlang testan
on mercfrot
ðanon anlang fliotes
on boddingmed
ðanon on boddanstan



The boundary leaves the Test at the *mercfrot* (presumably *flot* or *fliot*) and proceeds along the *fliotes*. This can be translated as following the boundary stream. The description of the features defining the boundary proceeds in a clockwise direction, crossing the valley from west to east. The stream was flowing in the opposite direction, from the higher ground and across the floodplain to join the Test as its tributary.

Old English Translator includes the following entry:

fleóte Weak Feminine Noun

a stream river rlvus

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	(the/that séo) fleóte	(the/those pá) fleótan
Accusative.	(the/that þá) fleótan	(the/those þá) fleótan
Genitive	(the/that þære) fleótan.	(the/those þára) fleótena
Dative	(the/that þære) fleótan.	(the/those þæm) fleótum

These definitions are from Bosworth Toller:

flot

es; n. [floten, pp. of fleótan to float]

Water deep enough for sustaining a ship, the sea

FLEÓT

fliét, es; m: fleóte, an; f.

I. a place where vessels float, a bay, gulf, an arm of the sea, estuary, the mouth of a river, a river, stream;

fleót an estuary. On brádan fleót; andlang brádan fleótes út on sáe, C. D. iii. 179, 28. On mearcfleótes múpan, . . . tó mylenfleótes múpan, 429, 4, 5. On seolcingfleót; eást andlang fleótes on haggan-fleót; andlang hagganfleótes, C. D. B. ii. 519, 14, 15.

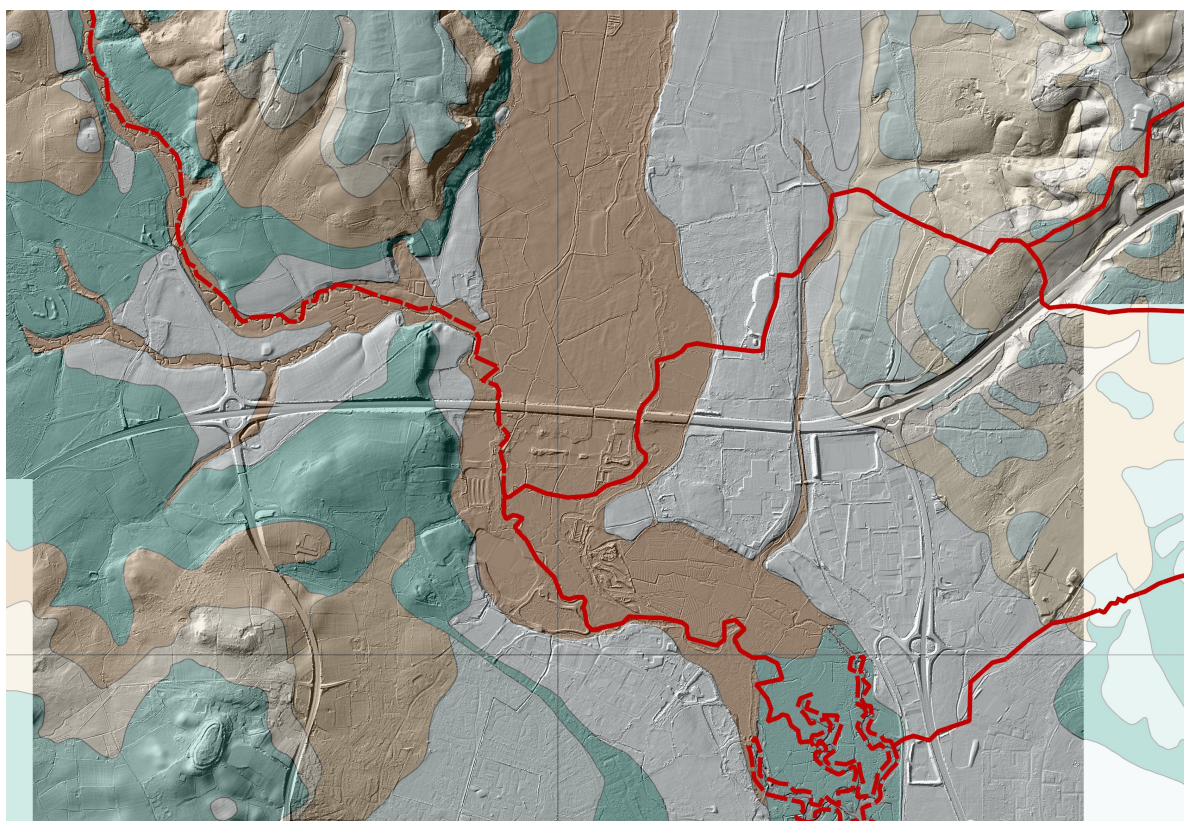
There are many words in Modern English that can be used for a watercourse: river, stream, brook, creek, rivulet, etc. The same was true of Old English. However, a speaker of Old English would have had a specific meaning in mind when describing a particular watercourse. The different words were not treated as synonyms. What does the choice of word used in the charter tell us about the watercourse on the Nursling boundary?

The topography of the Lower Test Valley has undergone considerable change since the Nursling charter was written in 877. This is very noticeable a century later in the description of the Romsey charter boundary where it adjoins Nursling. By this time the Test had been diverted to flow along the east side of the floodplain. This new channel would have cut through the boundary stream, severing its connection with the (Old) Test. While we are unable to observe the stream and its environment directly, we can examine the word used to describe it to help us imagine Anglo-Saxon Nursling in the 9th century.

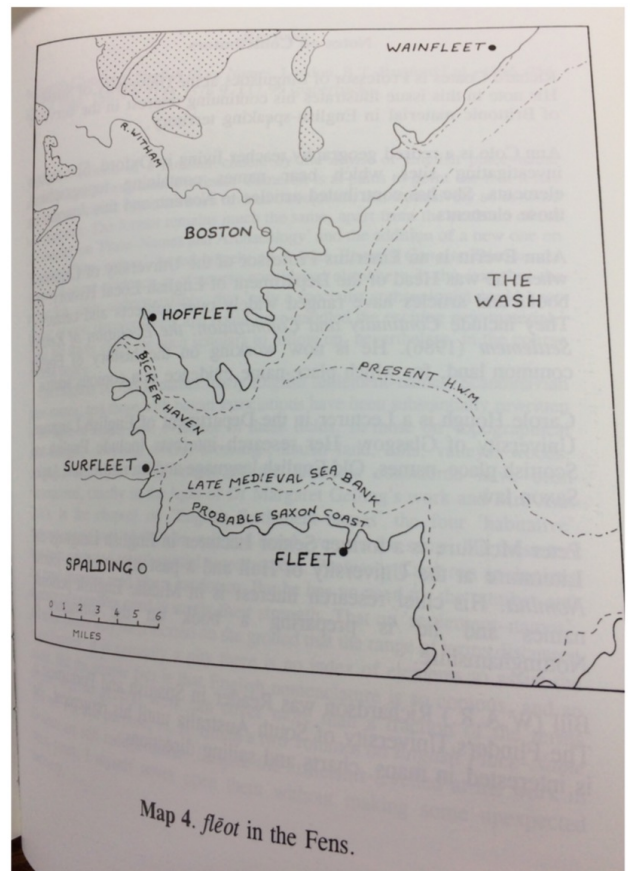
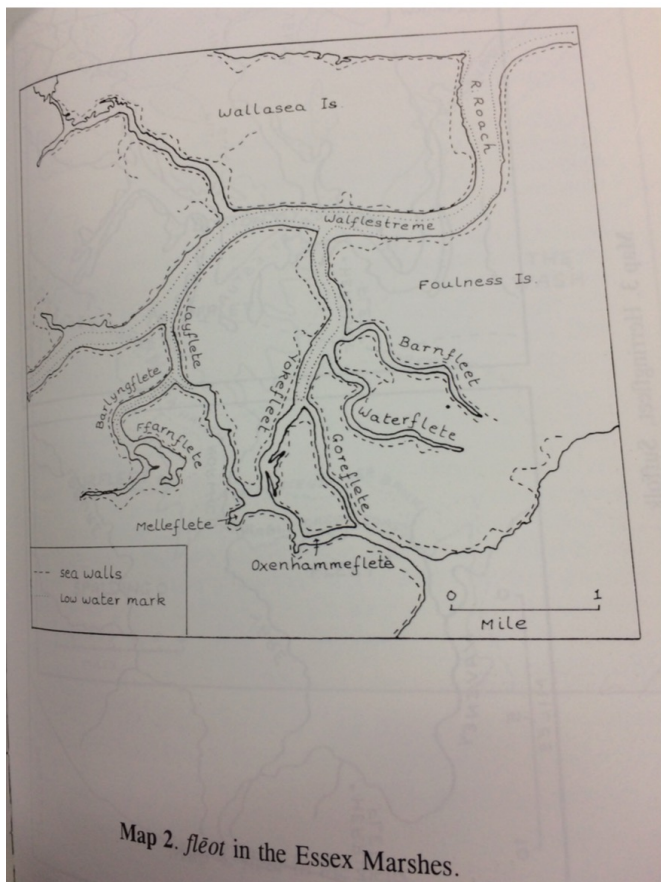
Ann Cole discusses the particular word of interest to us in an article in JEPNS vol. 29, 1996-1997, 'fleet: Distribution and Use of this OE Place-Name Element'. The word occurs along the east coast from the Humber Estuary, through Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex and to the estuary of the Thames. It was used in charter boundaries on the coasts of Kent, West Sussex and the Isle of Wight. The most westerly example was in Devon. The various 'fleet' streams shared a common attribute - they were tidal creeks. At low tide the water would retreat leaving mudflats exposed along their course through the salt marshes.

The LiDAR image below has been overlain with the superficial geology and the 1845 parish boundaries. The river terrace deposits are a pale grey. The brown alluvium of the floodplain extends south until it meets the tidal deposits which are coloured green. This marks the current extent of the tide.

There is evidence that the tidal estuaries of the Itchen, Meon and other Hampshire rivers extended further north than their current tidal limits. This is summarised in an article in HFC Newsletter by George Watts, 'Estuaries as Historic Landscape' (No 62, Summer 2014). The charter evidence suggests that the Test can be added to the list. These rivers would have been navigable further inland in the Anglo-Saxon period.



Fleot/Fleet names occur not just applied to creeks but also to the settlements associated with them. This use indicates the significance of the watercourse to the identity of a village, to the reason for its existence. It could be reached by water at high tide, serving as a link between land and sea for the transshipment of goods. A settlement along the tidal Test estuary would benefit from a double tide. Was the development of an early Christian settlement at Nursling influenced by its accessibility from the sea?



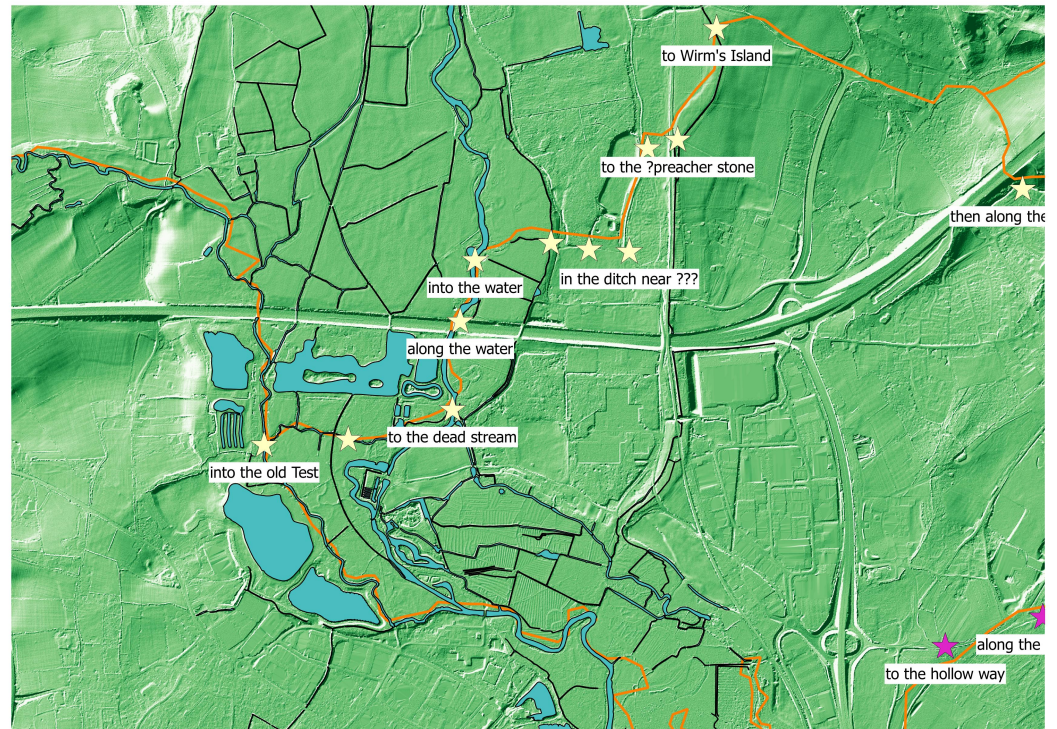
The maps above are from the article by Ann Cole.

Charter boundary clauses give a point to point description of features, proceeding in a clockwise direction. On a boundary shared by neighbouring estates, the surveys travel in opposition directions. There appears to have been a significant change in the topography of the floodplain along the Nursling/Romsey boundary in the century between the two charters. The north boundary of Nursling in 877 runs east from the Test along the boundary stream across the width of the floodplain. In Romsey's charter of c972, the stream has been replaced, from east to west, by the *heat/hae* (probably *heaf* meaning sea or water), a dead lake (stagnant water) and an island. The westernmost point is the Old Test. The Test has apparently been moved to a new main channel on the east side of the floodplain.

The construction of the Fishlake probably took place in the period between the two charters. Channeling water from the Test into Romsey would not have effected the course of the river further to the south. Moving the Test was a separate engineering project. It is easy to think of reasons for undertaking the building of the Fishlake. Providing water for Romsey would clearly have benefited the monastery and acted as a stimulus to the development of the town. Why move the Test?

The topography of the Lower Test Valley determined the settlement pattern. On the east side of the river is a broad river terrace, a flat area with well drained soil. There is no paired terrace on the west side. Diverting the river to the east made it accessible to any river terrace settlements. Nursling would have been the main beneficiary. The river would have been a convenient source of fish and possibly served as a navigable transportation route. If the river was tidal this far north it could have accommodated larger vessels. At some point in time a leat was dug through a projecting section of the terrace to power Nursling mill. Was there an earlier mill here? The rerouting of the Test was carried out within the boundary of the land granted to Romsey. What was the connection between Romsey and Nursling?

Romsey boundary:
 to bodestan
 suthe andlang lauen
 in ðe dich bi ðugen
 ðanne andlang dich
 in non ðe wiðige
 in an ðe heat (?heaf)
 andlang heae (?heaf)
 in ðan dede lake
 to huntesige
 in and ðan alde tersten



The image above shows the Romsey tithe map overlying a modern OS map. The current boundary between Romsey and Nursling is indicated by a dotted line. The Test has lost a couple of tight bends since the tithe map was drawn in 1845.